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April Nineteen-fifteen

61

By the Same Writer.

The Great Companions. 1908.

The Wanderer and Other Poems. 1910.

The Adventure: a Play. 1911.

The Free Spirit. 1914.

A Life of Walt Whitman. 1905.

Abraham Lincoln. 1907.

Walt Whitman and His Poetry. 1915.

April Nineteen-
Fifteen with Six Preludes in
Winter. Henry Bryan Binns
" "

London: 1915: A.C. Fifield, 13 Clifford's Inn

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Six Preludes in Winter:

1914-15

1. *Demeter's Fosterling*

THE loving solidity of the earth beneath my feet :
the evening sky, hurrying with hosts that it
transcends: the far-gleaming flood: the turn of the wet
road through the trees: the multitudinous presence of
the wooded hills—

Feed in my soul what is fellow of great kindred, com-
panion of the evening light :

They nourish something in me my thought of me would
find no place at all for : something that feeds on wonder :
Some infant that Demeter herself, unknown, is fostering :
tempering him with old-time rites as once Demophöon,
Cradled now in her own bosom, and now
Entrusted, watchfully, to the fire.

2. *Return*

I WILL go back into the blessed Earth !
I will not wait for Death to call me,
For dire disaster to befall me :
Thither whence I came forth I will go back.

Orphan my heart is, weak for mother-lack,
And can no more, for all its striving,
Endure the day of love's depriving:
To-night I will go back to Mother Earth.

Weary of me, weary for a new birth :
With me and my mere self-hood sated,
I come to be emancipated
From myself, dispossessed again—to-night.

3. *The Cage*

UPON these nights and days, as though they were
The wires and spaces of a cage, I beat
Restlessly, who for the open air
Am fashioned and complete.

The comfortable round of easy things—
Small passions, safe adventures, bloodless gifts—
Is all a prison to me whose wings
Are mightier than a swift's :

To whom the sky is natural, where each stroke
Upon the delicate air is perilous :
My spirit, that hath its wings unbroke,
Will not be cabined thus !

Whatever dread undreamt haunt the abyss,
Fear shall not clip me : I will draw my breath
Where life is full, whether on this
Or the yonder side of death.

Life is mine only while it bears the sheer
Exultancy of a spirit that hath striven
And won its free way through the sphere
That is both earth and heaven.

4. *The Tempest*

THE wind is full of wickedness
Wanting forth out of its lair:
The horror of a mad caress
Possesses the bewildered air.

Refuge from it is none for me
To-night : a voice of frenzied wrath
Yells through the world tempestuously :
My face is spattered with its froth.—

Yonder the world's at battle. Here
War also rages, bursting in
At chink and chimney, shrill with fear
That clamours down the tempest's din.

With every tool I touch I could
Do murder. An insensate breath
Gasps in my lungs : the only good
I can conceive of doing is death !

But in the spiritual ground
Beneath I thrust, grappling to keep
A stay-hold in this swirling stound,
This nightmare that is not asleep.

Urging its need my spirit delves
Deep in the dark : its roots are blind,
Yet they discover of themselves
That the mysterious Earth is kind.

Though all the world is wild with war,
Though madness riots in my brain,
The darkness opens like a door,
Earth takes me to her heart again.

My prayer finds out a secret way
Into the bosom of the Earth :
Down to the springs of life I pray—
The loving life that gave me birth.

5. *The Sword*

WHO carries in his hand a colder steel
Than hate ever begat or fire brought forth ?
Whose hand is sterner than the frozen North ?
The Love with whom I deal.

*My hands that create peace, my hands that bless,
These hands whereby upon the rood I hung,
Are the strong hands implacable that strung
My bow of righteousness :*

*And I am prince of peace because my glance
Is keener than the falcon's to discover
Hypocrisy, when it hides beneath the cover
Of a kind countenance :*

*Because, relentless as a surgeon's knife,
My love cuts out the cankering root of sin
That does its secret murdering within
The belov'd breast of life.*

Because he is calm with justice, he is peace :
He is love because he turns not in dismay
From death's dark office—body itself to slay
That spirit may have release.

6. *The Theme*

O TREMBLING wild uncertain note—
A 'wildering gleam, a gusty shower,
Sobbing in April's throat !
O cradle, on this perilous hour
Stormily tossed like a little boat !

O born before thy time,—a frail
Nothing—and yet a fierce desire
The cliff of life to scale !
O living, flickering spirit of fire
Smouldering in a smoky veil !

O, of what dark form art thou twin—
Companion in one body with
What shame—and yet dost win
Joy of thy melancholy kith,
Glory of thy poor shiftless kin !

Thou that, to my penitent eyes
Thy sempiternal beauty hast
Ever in doubtful guise
Discovered, and again aghast
I stood, my wisdom all unwise

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That shunned thy pitiful company
Of the stumble-footed and insecure :
I have sought only for Thee
But with blind sight, O holy and pure
Spirit that shunnest security !

April Nineteen-fifteen

I. All Fools' Day.

TO-DAY she comes : and all the wise remain
Buttoned into their buds. We April-fools
Already at her appearing
Hasten out-bursting recklessly to greet her,
Flinging our cloaks away,
Unfurling our flags of delight
That cannot be put up again
Though who knows what black blast
Shall leap out of the East to slay and ravage
Our young battalions, hanging down
Like blasted chestnut leaves, tattered upon us ?

Divine April herself is but a fool :
She puts her beauty in peril, her beauty that Earth
Dotes on. "April!"—her Mother cries,
"Why will you always haunt along the marches
Of terror, out of my sight, apart from your companions,
By your own wilful way?"

2.

O daffodils, wide-winged in the orchard grass,
O flowery garden-plots, welcome this April!
—In woods where her feet go
Are wind-flowers: and across the wide land
Cuckoo declares her. Twiggy labyrinths
Shrill with the glee of mouse-like visitors.
Pale cuckoo-flower ventures along the rill-side.
In the pine-wood, sea-light flows into pools:
There is a sea-sound: a resinous presence
Wanders the ways with æolian singing.

Not far is Death now the daffodils beckon:
For Joy, that in April delights to gather
Flowers, beckons Death and herself is
Fair for his gathering.

Stranger to Joy: dark: jealous of life's increase—
When he beholds Demeter's daughter,
Out of his seat in the grim grave, bursting
Like lava-ravin upon a blossomy world,
He snatches her.

3.

She stood with daffodils in the wet grass.
Her grey eyes flickered with the light
Of Earth's incredible promise, and I believed
The entire word of Freedom that was in her,
April-Persephoné. Her lips were telling
The syllables of delight: when—she was not:
I heard only the thick breathing of Death.

4.

He hath snatched her away : her promise is unfulfilled.
If in his eyes she was fair, he understood of her beauty
Only how exquisitely it should pleasure his sense.
He beheld her ; he snatched her away to his bridals ! She
A spirit like to the angels, that dwelt but in flesh to fulfil
That which she promised : but he hath snatched at her
flesh—

Trusting that it should betray this it was pledged to fulfil,
And cheat earth of that sheer joy that he hates, for his
proud

Tyrannous pleasure is only his own. But April's ever
Lifted the wild heart up out of desire into worship.
April's own delight was a sunbeam in the pine-wood,
Bidding the bodily forms declare the wonder within.

5.

The pine-trees stand up in the morning sun
With naked ruddy limbs, an Indian troop !
O far away they stand—O, long ago !
It is some morning of the early world
Ere I was young, and that insurgent sound
Murmurs on some forgotten strand of the sea.

In the midst, shadowy-clear,
Limned in a luminous sea-light,
One airily lifts its pale high stem
Up, a living marvel of line whose arrowy poise
Is so intense with movement that it sings
The syllables of April.

6.

In April-Persephoné
 The old, old dreams of Earth
 Are old, old dreams no longer !
 Liberty is a dream no more :
 A morning-spirit embodied
 She is standing in the sunny pool
 Of sea-light where the tall pines stand
 As at the beginning of days.
 As at the beginning, flickers
 Mystery in the girl's face, and her body
 Shines with her spirit, as the bodies of sea-children
 Gleam with the sea's strange glee.

*(Within me, Thou, fountain-head of all wonder—
 And shall I turn back again to last year's blossoming ?
 Shall I turn back to the joyless petals of joy ?—
 Within me, Thou, fountain-head of all wonder !)*

7.

As in the breeze the delicate daffodils
 Hesitate trembling : as visions etherial
 Catching at substance a moment, will tremble—
 So while the pines made a temple about her
 Filled with the sea-light, my faith
 Worshipping saw her. Frail as wood-sorrel
 That exquisite hope : it was fashioned
 Age-long in Earth's womb to a visible presence
 Out of the passion of faith, that of all
 Tissue of form is the last to endure.

Solid and sure stood the pines, but unreal
 Their shapes till among them this Presence,

Subtler than light. About her, incomparable,
The pines were for language : she uttering in them
The joy of her being,
Earth's ultimate essence and glory among the gods.

O April, spirit immortal of infinite meaning,
There is no creature of earth putting forth
The secret within him :—in the twigs no singer,
On the ocean of love no all-adventurer,
None that entrusteth to life the sacred thing
But gives you worship, Maiden,
Catching a glimmer of your delight.

8.

*Mistrustful, myself I know : I abandon me not to the fierce
Wantoning tide of the body : insidious tide of the soul,
Setting away to sea. Mistrustful—yet in myself
Somewhat I know to trust : yea, on the headlong current
Rushing to sea, I entrust to him heaven and earth !*

9.

Surely after long winter waiting, barren desolate days,
Purpose all but lost, no longer any meaning
In toiling or in pleasure—surely at long last,
Comes the incredible hope man had and had forgotten,
Stands again beside him the Shining Friend.

And the God-like spirit that is in man but slumbers
Answers with speech, responds with radiant eyes,
Comes forth into a new world heedless of aught
Save that to his companion he shall come forth and live.

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10.

" Come forth into your happiness that is the sun and rain :

Dear one, come forth into the new world here
Where summer is beginning !

Here cuckoo calls and shrill the wryneck answers :
Here the tall cherry-tree is full of bees :

Here is the Christ arisen out of the stony churches !

Here is youth ever-again renewing his wings : [nies :
Shedding of outgrown forms, here : shattering of tyran-
Here is mastery over the doubt

whether the will to create is after all creative
Or merely a vain billow, sinking, achieving nothing.

" In the world whose door I open—

Dear one, come forth to this new beginning of summer !—
Is defeat for the creepings upon you of sluggish doubt,
Is flouting of fear, is braving of slow paralysis :

The battle is pitched out here between daring and death.
Here call the marching drums, the whimbrel fifes of free-
dom—

Here outside your door, outside your door ! "

II.

What is this happiness among the grave trees—

An April daffodilly sprung of grey leaves ?

Little tree-creepers up the great stems run :

Up and up my heart goes, merry in the sun :

Some world-wonder elder than the trees

Opens my soul shut fast for centuries.

Grey-green my thoughts as the grey-green wood,
And pale among them the spear-bud stood,

Shy as a man's love—shyer than a boy's—
 Earthward turned its point—down-hung its neck :
 O pale no more, gold without fleck
 It is open wide to the uttermost joy !

12.

Now faith takes hold on wonder and hope stands fast !
 Beyond the Indian pines, armies of spears
 Rank in the milky light. Now doth a green
 Wonder descend like rain through the larch-wood.
 The spears thrust out a thousand slender arms
 And catch the lovely luminous gossamer
 About them, that, as they touch it, vanishes not :
 Their touch is magical and holds the dream.

13.

Because there are false dreams in the Earth,
 Let me believe the true !
 Because there is betrayal,
 Give me such faith as shall defy illusion !

For April speaks in my tongue, as in the pines' :
 Speaks with me, takes my body for a word
 Till every whit I am significant
 On her immortal breath :
 Sacred to myself ; a spirit
 Of infinite worth, henceforward
 Part of her speech—inseparably part.

14.

Clumsy-handed, the mid-wife Consciousness
 Cripples our infant joy, whose form is perfect
 For a wonder that she cannot apprehend.

In her habitual bandages she wraps him,
Swaddling the delicate stranger as he were
Bred of her body to grow such another as she !
Dull thoughts compass about the Babe with eyes
Secure against the vision of his divinity :
Eyes that deface whatever of spirit they behold
By looking upon it : blasphemous eyes that take
The glory from life and leave in its place a changeling
Image of the idolatrous brain. O reason
Is proof against the living wonder ! We serve
Knowing him not, the tyrant demon of Death,
That with his magic
Ever is throwing upon the screens of sense
Such cunning counterfeits of life as we,
Stupid-eyed, cannot tell for forgeries.
They come between us and Reality :
They cut us off from Truth : they cut Truth off
From our creative vision that would give
A body of delight to her bare joy.

15.

*I was divinely out of innocence
Created for some new
Glory of gladness ; but I wandered thence
And fell among the untrue
Shadows of joy—wed with I know not what
Monster who mastered me
And nursed my silly pride that I forgot
To kick at his decree—
Till now my hands are all horrid with blood,
Their deed before me lying :
Earth ringing round me : and the wrath of God
My name for a curse crying.*

16.

Through quiet nights of April's unfolding,
Ominous, the troop-laden trains, rumble unceasingly
With a far-away rumour of guns.
Through the gay streets, drums and the whimbrel fife :
And I hear loud, loud, the unbearable yelling of war.

In all the lambing meadows an under-throb
Of water-runnels, and on the windy air
Myriad twittering trills : but my ear-drums throb
With the heavy-pressure of far-away battle : my brain
Is ever aware of grief's whispering.

Wind-flowers whiten the wood-floor as a strand
That is shell-strewn and a-ripple still with the tide :
Bitter the tide that ripples among the pale
Innumerable empty shells of grief.

Dark, dark are the feet among the ghostly flowers :
The floor of the spring-wood is covered with tears !
The countless multitude of the anemones
That shimmer in the rustling wind is not so many
As the innumerable ghosts of joy—
Vivid with colour yesterday, to-day
Death-livid. The whole floor of the world
Gleams with the empty shells of life's vain promises
Strewn on it spendthrift by the mad sea.

17.

I saw a battle-field as large as London,
Upon it a million men were making war.
What they made was not so much hate and offal
As æons of labour for the patient gods.

As when, breaking into a craftsman's shop,
Rude hands destroy in a moment the cunning of years,
Shattering priceless jewels, each one an inspiration
Now again to seek on its inaccessible height,—
So when they make war, nations undo the Ages' labour
That again must be done over by the Heavenly Ones.

These suddenly slain, these horror-begotten deaths
Turn God aside from His creative joy
To the undoing, through countless nights, of grief.

18.

Over the fields where the runnels throb
With happy gushing of water, plovers beat
Heavy pinions with a desolate cry.
Across the happiness of the woods a shadow
Falls, and I catch the drum
Of iron wings that thresh the sky.

No longer runs the surge of the free
Wind in the pines : a chilly stillness
Steals in like a stranger. As when a hawk
Hangs, sword-like suspended upon a thread
Over the shrinking wood, and there is no more shrilly
Glee in the glades, and in the twiggy labyrinths
None stirs,—so terror draws now
Numbly about me.

Yonder invisible in the clouds
On bat-wings hovers Death :
Not holy Death, Sister of Birth, who opens
The bonding cage and lo, the bird goes free !—

But the obscene Arch-terror. He hath eyes
To search life's blossom out and rape its bright
Joy for his pleasure.

19.

Between the meadows and wood on the tumbled common
Where prickled hillocky whins are stubborn harsh
As though they had treasure to keep against enemies,
They are lavishing gold now and spices with fabulous
charity.

To-day their musty old damask is crested with splendour,
Their dusty darkness to-day is cresseted with a million
Yellow fires that smoulder against the blue
Weald in the sunshine !

The wind is east. O, if those little bright
Cressets should catch on the wind by magic,
Faster than squirrels through the dead brakes
They'd be leaping up the pines. They'd leap and run
Their pennon to the tops, and flare on the gale
That wicked oriflamme !

20.

On purring wings, prowling about the sky
Whetting his appetite, goes the high king
Of an ungarnished realm. His fancy sits
Astride an eagle with a quiver-full
Of lightning-bolts. He toys with mastery.
What the earth hath is his for the taking. Aloft
On the air he hovers : through the covering wood
Searches his quarry out and stoops upon her.
Flashing like Lucifer, he is fallen ! A cry
Shrieks through the vacant world. Here where she stood

Flames lap the pines. Fear stands where April stood.
 Stands lust where was my worship. The trees
 Begin to speak her language : O lust takes
 The words of joy into her mouth to speak them !

21.

*She, the seductress that men worship, came :
 And like a dead branch I was all aflame
 In the fierce mouth of her approach to me.
 A resinous dead branch was I, that she
 Lit as she grasped and it blazed into bloom
 That mocked the living boughs for their grey gloom
 And minim blossoms : mocked and overleapt
 The inglorious labours of the living : swept
 The garner of the forest in one swift
 Exultancy, and gave it for a gift
 To her whose nostrils delicately take
 The fragrance mighty conflagrations make.*

22.

Have you been in a wood where fire has been ?
 The stark trees left have such meaningless boughs !—
 They writhe them in the light
 That stares where April was but now
 Embodied in its worship.

23.

Always in his forgotten lair, biding his hour, waits the
 Dragon.
 Hiding he gloats on the advance of Man. Says he—
 “ Wholly at last the fool will commit his fortune to some
 adventure :

Against me defenceless then will he stand : I am ready."

War-drake !—crouching you wait the hour of man's nakedness :

Not for fear of your ambush will he forgo his enterprise
Freedom, forsooth, for your terror !

24.

There is no peace but it was royally
Bought with the ransom that alone sets free
From bloody striving,
The unreckoned price
Of irremediable sacrifice,
Extravagantly spilling
That purple riches no contriving
Can ever gather up again or fashion
Anew into the vehicle of passion.

There is no peace until some great desire,
That prudent men
For all their prudence cannot stop
Of its divine fulfilling,
Pour itself out to the last drop
On the barren altar-top :
But then—O, then !—
Does that desire's release
Call down the heavenly fire
That only is peace !
O blossoms then the flower
Of pure glory :
The untamable joy, the intense
Wild innocence
Of a power Intransitory.

25.

Worship beauty, brave heart, but most with your might :

Meetly to worship her is to be whole every whit :
Modest and swift, implacable, good at forgiving,
Calm but without indifference ;—for the lover of beauty
Is body and soul to the one purpose magically fashioned,
Clean-balanced to a keen point, a fine-tempered blade.

But they for whom the loveliness of fair things is a beguilement

To soften whatever of steel is in them, or play
Delilah tricks with their might, drowsing them in dreams
Unmanned, to clip and hand them over to their foe—
These know her not, pure goddess ! Worshippers these of idols

Wrought after her likeness, void of her prerogative
To command the creative passion untamable of Man.

He that worships her not is but a beast in his might.
His cunning and his power but perish upon him.
For it is by the worship of beauty we effectuate
The mysterious prepotency of manhood, begetting
Immortal offspring. Else we beget but monsters
That carry within their loins the seed of death.

26.

To keep the steel bright—the swift steel
Of the spirit I scabbard beneath
This cover of harmless aspéct !
Not as a ruffler would carry it
Naked in the street, but clean
In its dark sheath : no rust

Setting it in its security :
Jealously, morning and night,
Withdrawing it, lest it begin,
To its cloak and comfort adhering,
To lose its instancey, and the sharp
Challenge go by it.

27.

*It is not me you are seeking : it is not me
Your lips bespeak : not me your eyes discover !
It is not you, not you that are the lover
Will set my spirit free.*

*You are come to wrap me about in the dark beams
Of the moonlight : to blind my soul with illusion :
You are come to entice me away in my confusion
To dwell with you among dreams.*

*He has clear eyes, my lover : he has clear eyes !
Into the secret truth that is my being
His eyes look steadily, till in their seeing
I feel my spirit arise*

*No more to keep its secret, no more to keep
Hidden safe among dreams from the world's scorning.
He calls me out into the windy morning,
Out of my dreamy sleep.*

*But your eyes, when they touch me with gentle gaze,
Estrange my heart anew from the world out yonder :
They draw me away and away with you to wander
Far from the human ways.*

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*Thither my heart is too eager to go, too fain
To answer the touch of your delicate necromancy,
To turn from the stern truth to the fond fancy
And dream, O and dream, again.*

28.

As power that is not wrought of freedom sows
The quiet fields of unsuspecting folk
With war-spawn, dragon's teeth—so passion
That flinching fails of its own utmost fire
Begets a body of illusion : fair
Or foul as he shall see it, but false : creates
A form of life magical to deceive
The senses and the brain.—

O, Earth's unclean !
Through the open doors of her republic, strangers
Throng in, a motley crew,—abortions, monsters,
Ghosts, the unnatural offspring of desire
Misplaced and passion thwarted of its own
Clean purpose, to attain perverse delights.
This dark of night is thick with magic : none
May know the false from true : till Beltane fires
Bring Easter in and purge the sickened earth
Of the exotic odour of Death who makes
Unholy love to Earth's most holy—and bring
Health again to the sun, and to my heart
Hallowing with that blood of sacrifice,
That robbery of joy, that heightens it.

29.

On the eve of her last night—Walpurgis' night—she said

" I only have the key of all Earth's secret joy :
I am her daughter : I have dwelt with Death
In his dark house : I have the key of joy."

Then of her joy I was afraid.—“ O, April,
You that open the doors, is it you then
That loose Terror himself, and all his rout
Whom winter held under the ground ; whom Earth,
Generous Earth, forbade until you loosed them—
Lewd shapes, shadows that, under to-night's full moon,
Will make unclean Earth's dreaming loveliness—? ”

“ Yea,” said April, “ I open the prison doors
To all that will. Everyday I give life
To the hitherto forbidden : and on May-eve
Comes to the sill of being all the host
That dwells in secret and dares not the sun.
I open the door if haply one should dare.”

30. *Walpurgis and May-Eve.*

I looked in my heart, and in my heart I saw
The phantom-throng of all the things I dread :
The uncreated dreams and hesitations,
The partly-willed, partly-rejected passions
Of body and soul that hide there in the dark.
“ Maiden,” I cried, “ you will not open the door
To these and let Hell loose ! ”—

But one grey thing
Looked strangely at me (out of my heart),
Holding out, as it were, passionate hands
To April, and holding me, as it were, with eyes.
“ Yea, then, let this one forth, but alone, April ! ”

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But only she answered, " I open the door."

And all stood thronging at the sill, the grey
Intense eagerness in my heart among them.
" Who is this shadow among the shades ? " I said.

She only said again, " I open the door."

" Not that this raging Hell within me escape
To do its mischief on the earth ! "

The door
Opens : and out into Walpurgis' night
The shapes go flocking, flickering under the moon.
I see them go :—my lust flaunting itself :
All my cunning hypocrisy, full-robed
And strutting in absurd complacency.
So was I shamed.

But April, ere she went,
Laughed, looking on that emancipated world
As though it pleased her divine eyes, and said,
" Those are but shadows you gaze upon. Beltane
Fire and May-morning will winnow away
The shadows and purge the air clean !
See : I open the doors of your eyes," she said.
And it was the prisoner I beheld, but as one
No more fearful of light—
For he stood looking into the Maid's eyes
Whence daylight sprang intenser. Then on me
Also, he turned his face, kindling. I knew
Myself as but the dim ghost of that quickening joy.

Envoy

*I AM going now into the dark and away,
For now comes my fulfilling :
The incredible wonder that you dared to hear me say
Now all the little leaves are telling.*

*April am I and have the key of Earth's joy,
But oh, my Sister May, she who comes after,
Is life's very bliss that nothing shall destroy !
I have unlocked, I have let loose,
O I have freed the laughter
Divine, that out of wood and wild
With lovely mirth
Comes now redeeming—like a heavenly child
For her who gives him birth—
All the days of strangeness, and of sadness, and of dearth.*

*I am going now into the dark and away :
To-morrow comes and nowhere shall he find me.
I leave the doors all open wide behind me.—
When this empty dark grows again grey
With crying of horns and blithe singing
Out of the wild wood they'll be bringing
in May.*

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